



# SENATOR KAREN KEISER

33RD LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

*Serving the 33rd  
Legislative district is an  
honor and a privilege.  
To best serve you, I must  
hear your thoughts and  
concerns, so please do not  
hesitate to contact me.*

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- Transportation;
- Environment, Energy & Water;
- State & Local Government; and
- Labor, Commerce & Financial Institutions  
(Vice Chair)

Dear Neighbors,

This year I was honored to serve as your state senator after representing you in the House for the past six years. I have to say that after three years of gridlock in the House, it was a wonderful experience to be able to take decisive action and have many important bills passed by the Senate.

In just 60 days, your Legislature accomplished much more than had been expected. I hope you'll look at some of the "top ten" bills that I was pleased to sponsor, support and vote for.

The operating and transportation budgets grabbed all the headlines. We were able to cure the much-publicized \$1.5 billion operating budget deficit with a combination of cuts, efficiencies and new revenue — but without a general tax increase.

Legislators also approved a transportation package that will be on the ballot this fall. It is linked to several key congestion-relief projects for our district, which are detailed in this newsletter. But I am disappointed that we'll lose another summer construction season between now and the November election. In my opinion, these projects are critical to the economy and citizens in our district and we must move ahead.

The capital — or construction — budget contains an economic stimulus plan that will create jobs during the current recession, and includes major funding for the Kent train station, Highline Community College and desperately needed noise relief for the Highline School District.

But budgets are only part of the story. I hope you'll keep reading to find out some of the significant improvements the Legislature passed this session — including many that will improve the business climate and better the lives of working families.

I want to thank you for the opportunity and privilege to represent the citizens of the 33rd District in the state Senate. Please feel free to contact me or my assistant Erin Speck by phone, e-mail or letter.

Always,

Karen Keiser  
State Senator  
33rd Legislative District

## Arsenic Update

Arsenic from the old Asarco smelter has been detected in dangerous levels in South King County soil. I am studying this developing issue. If you would like more information on what you can do, visit [www.metrokc.gov/health/tsp/arsenic.htm](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/tsp/arsenic.htm), or feel free to call my office.

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## Transportation — finally moving forward

The top priority for this year’s session was passage of a comprehensive transportation package.

Our region has the dubious distinction of being the second most congested traffic in the nation. Citizens waste countless hours stuck in traffic jams, and business is losing millions of dollars in lost time and productivity.

The Senate passed the statewide revenue transportation package, and the House insisted that the package be sent to the voters. I voted for the package because I think it is a good, balanced proposal.

Here’s what will be on the ballot in November:

### Statewide revenue

The package would invest \$7.7 billion in roads, ferries, rail facilities and public transportation over 10 years. The revenue is tied to specific projects and would come from a 9-percent increase in the statewide gas tax, phased in over two years; a 30 percent increase in weight fees for commercial trucks, also phased in over two years; and a 1 percent increase in the vehicle sales tax.

The proposal includes the following projects for south King County:

- \$500 million to extend SR 509 all the way to Interstate 5, which would relieve Southcenter Hill of truck-clogged commutes, and provide an efficient route for trucks from the Port to the Kent valley.
- \$154 million to add lanes to I-5 between 320th Street and 210th Street, and an additional \$69 million to complete the HOV system between Tukwila and the Pierce County line.
- \$2.6 billion for expansion of I-405, and to relieve the horrible

choke points at the Southcenter and SR 167 interchanges.

- \$5 million to upgrade the I-5 interchange at 272nd Street.
- \$8.5 million to extend South 228th Street in Kent, which will help move freight more efficiently.
- \$8 million to undertake a new approach to the SR 167 corridor, so future highway improvements can be better coordinated throughout the Kent valley.

According to estimates, this plan is projected to create 20,000 new jobs during the next 10 years. The average motorist will pay about \$68 more each year, when the proposed gas tax increase is fully implemented in 2004.

### New efficiencies and accountability in place

The Department of Transportation has new leadership, and with passage of a major bill incorporating several efficiency and accountability standards, I believe our transportation dollars will be well spent. The efficiencies bill has four parts:

- It establishes benchmarks and performance standards to measure efficiencies;
- It allows for contracting with private engineering companies to improve our engineering expertise;
- It updates the prevailing wage survey process; and
- It requires cost-effective state and local transportation planning and maintenance.

In the Senate transportation budget, I was able to win agreement to begin a siting study to search for a location for a second regional airport. Unfortunately, this important



first step towards relieving the pressure on SeaTac International Airport was stopped in the House.

### Regional transportation package also passed

Voters will also have an opportunity to choose whether our Puget Sound region should undertake our own major transportation improvement projects.

We passed this new approach to transportation funding because it has become apparent that the citizens in Puget Sound counties have been subsidizing the transportation projects of large parts of Eastern Washington. Our regional “return on taxes paid” has been less than fair for several years, and by addressing our regional needs ourselves we can begin a more equitable process to meet our region’s transportation needs.

This package includes three counties: King, Pierce and Snohomish. Any final package must be submitted to voters before being enacted. I voted for the regional package, although I would like to see a larger emphasis on transit in the final proposal.

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# Balanced budget, no general tax increase

When faced with a \$1.5 billion deficit, our options were limited. This budget contains no general tax increases, instead we relied on budget cuts, reserve funds and tobacco settlement revenue to fill a \$1.5 billion hole.

## Balanced cuts

When it came to cuts, no agency or program was spared. More than \$600 million in program cuts were made, and some 1,500 state employee jobs were cut. State employees were also denied any cost of living increase, and will have increased health care co-pays and premiums. In addition, public schools and colleges saw program reductions, along with every other part of state government.

## Reserves

We use \$325 million in emergency reserve funds, leaving approximately \$300 million in total reserves. These savings had been put away for a rainy day—

and now it's definitely raining.

## Tobacco assets

We also “securitize” about one-quarter of the state’s share of the 1998 settlement of the national tobacco litigation—a financial tool used by at least six states and being considered by 11 other states this year. Doing so allows us to use \$450 million to offset our deficit and shifts the risk from the state to purchasers of the securities. Although first reports claimed that this approach would mean a large loss in future revenues, fiscal analysis shows a 90 percent retention of the funds.

## New revenues

We also looked at tax exemptions and new revenue sources. Proposals to radically increase gambling were rejected, but we did pass one bill to allow the state to join the “Big Game” a multi-state lottery that’s estimated to generate several million dollars in new revenue. We eliminated a tax

exemption for out-of-state printers, but even that was difficult and passed over substantial opposition. Despite these efforts, our budget remained BELOW the I-601 spending limit!

These solutions were emergency responses to an emergency situation. Two thirds of our budget shortfall developed following the shocks of September 11th with a steep loss in consumer spending, tourism and big aerospace reductions. Hopefully our economy will become stronger over the next several months so that next year’s budget is less difficult. The alternative to this “cut and paste” budget would have been severe reductions in health care and nursing home services for our most vulnerable elderly, disabled and ill citizens. If the economy does not improve, however, difficult cuts or increased revenues may be required next year.

## Revitalizing our economy

This year’s capital budget includes an economic stimulus plan that will create jobs during the current recession. More than \$8 million of this construction will be done right here at home, including repairs to Highline Community College tunnels, roofs and the Redondo pier.

Highline School District students, faculty and staff will start to get relief from the roar of jet engines overhead. The district will receive \$5 million as the state’s one-year share of a 10-year plan to lessen aircraft noise.

The Kent Station project will be undertaken with the help of \$900,000.

## The Legislative ‘Top 10’

As I mentioned earlier, the Legislature’s 60-day session was very productive. Several important new bills passed and have been signed into law by Gov. Locke. Here are my favorite “Top 10”:

- **Family care**—More workers are becoming sandwiched between caring for their children and caring for aging parents. They need more flexibility in how they balance work and family, which is the goal of the family care law. This historic legislation allows workers with sick leave or paid leave—which is 50 percent of our state’s work force—to use it to care for an ill spouse, parent, grandparent, in-law or child.
- **School bullying**—The safe schools bill targets harassment and bullying in public schools by

requiring teachers, principals and parents to intervene. This has been a long-sought goal of mine. Any parent who has seen the harm bullying does understands the need for this bill.

- **Credit scoring**—Consumers with perfect driving records were discovering that their auto insurance was more expensive or even being canceled because they didn’t use enough credit—or had a mysterious credit “score” that hurt their insurance rates. The “credit scoring bill” limits insurance companies’ use of credit reports when selling insurance policies, because they unfairly discriminate against otherwise qualified applicants. It bans their use for insurance renewals.

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- **Unemployment insurance**—The major unemployment insurance reform bill makes the unemployment insurance tax system more fair to businesses. It will reduce the unemployment taxes paid by retailers, restaurants and manufacturers like Boeing by more than \$158 million and will limit future increases. Certain seasonal employers have enjoyed lower premiums than other businesses, and that inequity will now end. The bill also caps the maximum benefit and it provides \$34 million for retraining laid-off Boeing workers paid for with premiums paid by Boeing.
- **Overtime for nurses**—Mandatory overtime is driving nurses from the profession, adding to the already serious nursing shortage. This bill prohibits hospitals from requiring registered nurses to work mandatory overtime shifts, except during an emergency. Poor patient care has resulted from over-tired nurses forced to take repeated double shifts.
- **School district health benefits**—School districts will be able to join the state’s Health Care Authority with the same conditions as state employees, under this legislation, which could save teachers and classified staff up to \$3,000 per year in health-care premiums.
- **Collective bargaining**—State employees, four-year college and

university faculty, and University of Washington teaching assistants will have collective bargaining rights under a bill that also provides for major civil service reform and new authority for contracting out.

- **Bank and car robbery**—Local banks have seen an increase in robberies because federal laws aren’t a sufficient deterrent. The bill makes bank robbery a state crime so state authorities can investigate, and increases the penalty. Another bill will increase penalties for car robberies, which are also on the upswing.
- **Assault victims**—Hospitals will be required to provide victims of sexual assault with emergency contraception on a routine basis, and domestic violence victims who are forced to quit their jobs to escape an abusive spouse will now qualify for unemployment benefits.
- **Drug treatment**—Nonviolent drug offenders can be released early from prison if they undergo strictly supervised drug treatment. These treatment programs have been shown to be an effective deterrent to future offenses. This approach not only saves money, it rescues futures.

The two major disappointments were bills that failed to pass the House:

- The Prescription Drug Preferred Program—which would save seniors thousands of dollars in prescription drug costs—passed the

- Senate but failed to move forward.
- The school levy bill, which would make a simple majority vote sufficient to pass, instead of the current “super majority” now required.

I hope both of these proposals will be more successful next year.

One other issue that I continue to work on concerns families who are struggling with mental illness. I sponsored legislation—at the suggestion of a Kent family—to allow mental health advance directives, a new legal tool that gives people with mental illness the right to direct their mental health treatment.

Many citizens have found our current system allows no intervention earlier in a crisis that could prevent further deterioration. My bill to create mental health advance directives made real progress and passed the Senate but failed to pass in the House this year. I’ll try again next year!

**SENATE DINING ROOM:**

As a former member of the House and a new member of the Senate, I found the proposal to share a cafeteria with House members to have a great deal of merit. Poor communication can sometimes be overcome over a cup of coffee or bowl of soup. That is one reason why I declined to sign the letter demanding a separate Senate dining facility.